

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-3

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A bloody finger points at Soviets

Some quotes you read once. Then you read them again. Then you read them again. And then it dawns on you that regardless of how many times you read this quote it still does not make sense.

Take, for example, a recent statement made by Secretary of State George P. Shultz before a conference here sponsored by the Jonathan Institute, a group with headquarters in Jerusalem that is named after Jonathan Netanyahu (who led and died in the Israeli hostage rescue mission at Entebbe). Speaking about the plot to murder the pope, Mr. Shultz said:

"And we are now watching the Italian authorities unravel the answer to one of the great questions of our time: was there Soviet-bloc involvement in the attempt to assassinate the pope?"

Huh?

Now, it's one thing to say there are unanswered questions about the role of the Soviet Union in this atrocity, which is, arguably, the crime of this century. But it defies rational analysis to try and figure out why our secretary of state still speaks as if we are in the dark regarding Soviet-bloc involvement in this attempted murder.

In fact, the attitude of the entire Reagan administration toward this shooting — from day one when it occurred — defies rational analysis. Since the day this attempted assassination happened, various administration officials — on-the-record, off-the-record and on so-called background — have thrown cold water on the idea that the Soviets were involved in this heinous plot.

At the end of last month, the New York Post reported that CIA Director William Casey had removed his agency's top spy in Italy "for trying to sabotage the Italian investigation into Soviet bloc links to the plot to kill the pope." Senior U.S. intelligence and congressional sources are reported as saying that Mr. Casey decided to do this after a report from Italian prosecutors that provided evidence of a Bulgarian connection to this assassination attempt.

But why? Why all this foot-dragging since there is so much overwhelmingly convincing evidence that points the bloody finger at the thugs in the Kremlin and their puppets in Sofia? Among those who have persuasively and in great detail connected the dots that have revealed a distinct picture of a Soviet-

Bulgarian plot to murder his holiness, are: Italian State Prosecutor Antonio Albano, who has assembled 25,000 pages of evidence; journalist Claire Sterling; NBC reporter Marvin Kalb; Soviet disinformation specialist Arnaud de Borchgrave; and Paul Henze, author of "The Plot To Kill The Pope" (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983).

In his report, Mr. Albano writes: "The Bulgarian secret services had a specific political interest in killing Pope John Paul II. The imposing rise of Solidarity in Poland in the summer of 1980 and consequent social convulsions constituted a most acute crisis for the socialist states of Eastern Europe. This was perceived as a mortal danger to their political cohesion and military strategy."

"And since Poland's ideological collapse was mostly due to the fervid religious faith of the population — sustained and helped above all by the first Polish pope in history — the Polish rebellion might be greatly weakened and fragmented [by his] physical elimination."

"It is easy to see what really happened. In some secret place, where every secret is wrapped in another secret, some political figure of great power took note of this grave situation and, mindful of the vital needs of the Eastern bloc, decided it was necessary to kill Pope Wojtyla."

In his book, Paul Henze concludes that "historical, inferential, circumstantial and solid factual evidence all point in the same direction to explain the plot against John Paul II — toward Moscow" with the Bulgarians as "the prime contractors for the undertaking." Why? For three reasons:

The pope is Polish; he is the head of the Roman Catholic Church, and he is a tireless advocate of freedom of the human spirit and the right of the individual human being to choose his course in life. Says Mr. Henze:

"This is a poisonous combination for the Soviet rulers. The problem is not only that it undermines their control over Poland. Ultimately it threatens their power over their own people. Stalin's crude gibe about the 'pope's divisions' has come back to haunt his successors."

So, Mr. Secretary sir, I guess my point is that as regards the plot to murder the pope, the great unanswered questions of our time are not: Was there Soviet or Soviet-bloc involvement? The answer is: Yes. The only great unanswered question of our time now is: Why don't you and other senior Reagan administration officials seem to believe this?